

Section 2: Learning from rural women

about section 2

This Section introduces a range of techniques to help development workers understand the needs and priorities of women and to involve them in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of resource management activities. The majority of the techniques used come under the category of 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' (PRA) method, which relies on the involvement of local people in defining their problems and choosing possible solutions rather than using conventional village surveys and secondary data. The techniques have not been developed specifically for working with women, but are applicable in the more general context of working with any local community as a whole. They can, however, be used to explore the roles, needs and priorities of women by using them separately with groups of women and men. Commonly used processes for analysing gender disaggregated information are also included towards the end of the Section.

Talking to women

Talking to women clearly results in double benefits:

- we are better informed as a result of talking with them and thus they stand a better chance of getting their points of view taken into account in any work initiated
- the women gain from being included in this learning process so that male-biased knowledge does not neglect or adversely affect them.

However, there are usually many constraints in reaching women:

- cultural and social barriers may restrict women's movements and their ability to attend meetings or even informal gatherings
- heavy workloads may mean that they have little or no 'spare' time for meetings/discussions with development workers or others
- when they can and do attend meetings and gatherings, they are often inhibited by the presence of men.

These issues need to be addressed if we are to be successful in reaching out to women. Before we can even begin to talk to women, social and other barriers need to be broken down to open channels of communication. This is often one of the most difficult tasks of working with women. It requires gaining trust and establishing a rapport. To make the process of communication with women effective and useful, we need to identify the subject areas in which such communication would be useful. This in turn means understanding:

- what women know
- what we can learn from them.

What can be learnt from rural women?

A study of activities in which women are involved will tell us something about the types of knowledge that women make use of in their daily lives. The results will vary, depending on each social structure and how it affects the division of labour, the existence of any taboos on women's involvement in certain activities, the extent to which cooperatives or working groups are responsible for some activities, and whether or not men go outside the community for seasonal or year-round employment. Table 1 shows an example of a general division of labour between rural women and men in Asia.

Table 1: Gender-based division of labour

Activity	Gender	Frequency
Homestead-based		
Cooking/cleaning	F	Daily
Child/elder care	F	Daily
House repair	M	Occasional
Collection of water	F	Daily
Tree/vegetable cultivation	F	Seasonal
Livestock maintenance	F	Daily
Forest-based		
Fuelwood collection	F	Daily
Fodder collection	F	Daily
Timber collection	M	Occasional
Collection of non-timber forest produce	F	Seasonal
Hunting	M	Occasional
Field-based		
Land preparation	M	Seasonal
Sowing	M/F	Seasonal
Weeding	F	Seasonal
Harvesting	M/F	Seasonal
Processing	M/F	Seasonal
Marketing	M	Seasonal

EXERCISE 5

What do rural women know?

1. Think about the situation in your area of work. What determines the types of activities in which rural women are involved? Do any of the above factors apply? Make a list of any other reasons why women are involved, or not involved with certain activities in the communities with which you are familiar. Consider how this differs between different households.
2. Now, consider who does what in the communities with which you work. Seven different categories of work are presented in Table 2. Each category has been divided into a number of different activities. Fill in the table, considering one activity at a time. Mark an '✖' in the box under the person most involved in each activity.
3. When you have completed the table, spend a few minutes identifying those activities which are not traditionally the responsibility of women, but which have become a recent addition to their workload. For instance, in some areas, women's increasing role in agriculture has meant that they are now involved in traditional male activities, such as ploughing the land and looking after cattle. It is useful for us to know which activities women have started doing only recently, not least because they may require some training to develop new skills.

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You may like to make use of these completed lists when you talk with rural women, men and children in your work. You can certainly check your ideas on the division of labour and explore in greater depth women's knowledge of a particular activity. Perhaps some activities are undertaken by women during certain times of the day or certain months of the year, and by men at other times.

Table 2: Household division of labour (women = W, men = M, girls = G, boys = B)

	W	M	G	B		W	M	G	B
1. Collection and gathering					4. Growing trees				
water					Land preparation				
fuel: wood					Planting				
dung					Protecting young trees				
fodder					Applying pesticides				
wild plants: medicine					Pruning, maintaining				
food					Harvesting fruit, etc.				
other uses					Felling				
2. Looking after cattle					Market produce				
Supervision of grazing					5. Harvesting and processing fish				
Stall-feeding and watering					Gathering seafoods				
Tending to sick animals					Harvesting fish from fish traps				
Milking					Fishing from boats				
Processing and marketing of milk					Processing fish				
Selling and buying animals					Selling fish/seafood				
3. Growing crops					Making nets and other fishing gear				
Land preparation					6. Looking after the household				
Planting					Cooking				
Weeding					Washing utensils				
Applying fertilizers, pesticide					Washing clothes				
Bird-scaring					Looking after children				
Harvesting					Cleaning the house				
Transporting harvest					Tending the garden				
Processing					Buying household goods				
Marketing					Building and maintaining house				
Buying seeds and inputs					Other				

Table 2 (continued): Household division of labour (women = W, men = M, girls = G, boys = B)

	W	M	G	B		W	M	G	B
7. Making decisions					Credit				
Crops					- when to take loans				
- which crops to grow					- how to repay loans				
- where					- what to use loans for				
- when to plant/harvest					- amount to borrow				
- marketing					Education				
Trees					- which children should go to school				
- which trees to grow					- when to stop their education				
- where					- how to pay for school fees				
- how to use them					Budget				
Livestock					- responsibility for savings				
- when to buy/sell					- responsibility for loan repayments				
- price to pay/sell					- amount to spend on festivals, weddings				
- milk to sell/use for household					- amount to spend on household needs				
- how to manage									

The natural resources that women are familiar with will also be those they use in their daily lives. How we learn about these resources will vary according to what we need to know and what is relevant to our needs. Table 3 makes some suggestions about the types of questions to ask rural women regarding:

- their knowledge of and their ideas about the local environment and the natural resources that they use
- the status of these resources and their management by the local people, in particular by women.

Learning from rural women

Box 1: Questions about resource use

Availability of the resource

What do the women think about :

- the seasonality of the resource (does its availability change throughout the year and how?)
- any long term trends (is the availability of the resource changing from year to year and how?)
- why is the availability changing?

Quality of the resource

What do the women think about :

- the quality of the resources?
- the seasonality in quality (does the quality change throughout the year, and how?)

Management of the resource

What do the women think about :

- how much the resource is being used?
- the seasonality of exploitation (is the resource exploited more at certain times of the year? When? Why? Is it exploited in different ways at different times of the year? When? How? Why?)
- any long-term trends (is the use of the resource changing over the years? If so, how? Why?)
- how does its use affect the availability and quality of the resource?
- are there any limits or controls set on the levels of use? Who sets them? How do they work?
- what is the best way to manage the resource?

As a general tip it is useful to remember we can ask about any topic from the different angles of :

Who? When? What? Where? Why? How?

You could choose a particular resource with which you are familiar, such as water from a particular stream, pond, lake, or fuelwood and fodder from an area of forest or common land and work through this list to try and ask yourself about this resource. For instance if we were trying to learn about the use of water in a village and we wanted to discuss a particular stream which we knew to be polluted, we could ask :

Who uses this stream?

When do they use it? (time of day, month)

What do they use it for? (irrigation, washing, fishing)

Where does the stream flow to, from?

Why is the water quality getting worse?

How can the water quality be improved?

How can we learn from rural women?

The methods that we use to learn from rural women will depend on the amount of information, level of detail and accuracy and the type of information required. For instance, if we needed detailed information on several households' use of certain resources during one year, we would probably have to spend some time living with the households, observing their daily activities and recording the details in a standardised format. If, on the other hand, we needed to know about the resource use in a whole village or cluster of villages, it would not be possible to devote so much time to a detailed investigation of each household, and therefore a questionnaire might be needed to cover a large number of households in a relatively short period of time.

The learning techniques that will be dealt with in this section are particularly appropriate for use in the following contexts:

- where the learning and investigating takes place informally
- where most of the information to be collected is of a qualitative nature
- where the learning and investigating is being done by local people (researchers, field workers, project staff) together with the rural women and men
- where the focus is at a local (for example, village) level
- where money and/or time is limited.

The techniques will not be so appropriate in situations where:

- much of the information needed is quantitative and will be used for statistical analysis
- a formal questionnaire survey is to be the focus of the work
- information is to be collected on a large (eg, regional or national) scale.

Informal interviews

The simple technique of informal interviews is one with which most of us are familiar and it is at the centre of any rural appraisal. Informal interviews are informal conversations rather than formal question and answer sessions. They take place in the field or at the home of the interviewee and questions are not fixed before the interview. Rather than using a questionnaire, the interviewers draw up a checklist of issues, from which to choose certain topics to cover in any one interview. The success of the interview will largely depend on a relaxed atmosphere and an open learning attitude of the interviewer(s). The interviews should be short – probably no more than an hour for an individual interview and no longer than two or three hours for a group discussion (this does of course depend on how rushed or interested the interviewees are).

Some hints on interviewing

Starting off well

- the first time you visit a village, pay a courtesy visit to the leader to introduce yourselves and to explain the reason for your visit
- approach the place of interview on foot; a vehicle will give the appearance of important, rushed and wealthy intruders

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- choose the location carefully. If discussing a particular area or feature in the village, try to make sure its in view. If the topic is sensitive or personal, it is probably best to hold the interview in the home of the interviewee
- sit at the same level as the interviewee(s). If in a group discussion, try to arrange to sit in a circle to ensure maximum eye contact among all participants. If there are several interviewers, don't all sit together in a group.

Sequence of discussion

- begin by introducing yourself: **who** you are, **where** you come from, **why** you have come
- check that you have come at a suitable time
- start the interview by talking about something simple and familiar, such as the crop in the nearby field, the stove in the home, or the livestock in the compound. Discussing the weather and the seasons are always good ways of starting a conversation
- if the interviewee has difficulty answering a particular question, or you feel unsure about any answer, try and think of different ways of asking it and come back to it later in the interview
- always finish by thanking the interviewee and asking whether she has any questions.

Things to avoid:

- don't ask questions randomly. Try to follow up each line of discussion before moving on to a new topic
- try to avoid asking leading questions. For instance, rather than asking, 'Will you plant groundnuts here after harvesting the maize?', ask 'How will you use this land after the maize harvest?'
- don't dominate the interview. Try to spend more time listening than talking
- don't continue the interview if the interviewee seems uncomfortable or anxious to leave.

Box 2: Sequences of checklists for guiding interviews

If interviewing is spread over several days, the investigators will find themselves increasingly focusing their work as their level of knowledge grows daily. As a result, they may use more refined checklists as their learning progresses. Below is an example of the sequence of checklists, used during an RRA exercise that focused on soil and water conservation. Note how the issues in the first checklist are very general, in comparison with the later ones.

First checklist, to be used for the first two days

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| ● current soil and water conservation activities | ● beliefs, experiences and memories |
| ● climatic factors | ● labour availability and conflicts |
| ● sources of food | ● group/individual approach |
| ● land-use history, future conflicts; security and tenure | ● gender issues |
| ● use of external resources; natural and economic | ● education and training; farmers, children, extension |
| ● crops, livestock and trees; multiple functions | ● health |
| ● institutional issues | ● farm transect |

Box 2 (continued): Sequences of checklists for guiding interviews

Second checklist, to be used on the third day	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● livestock – fodder● manure● diseases● second transect● farm sketch map – intercropping● livestock● soil conservation● water management● health● education● female labour calendar	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● soil and water conservation during which months?● important dates, major achievements, population increase, changes in cropping patterns, future changes● institutions● communal works?● medicinal and other uses of trees and wild plants● calendar for prices of horticultural crops, livestock and wage rates● wealth indicators
Third checklist, to be used on the fourth day	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● institutions – what does the women’s group do?● seasonal fodder use – for calendar● artificial insemination problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● food availability● alternative sources of income
Fourth checklist, to be used on the fifth day	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● historical information – distribution of land settlement arrangement● dams affecting rainfall – when were they built?● controlled grazing – when, how organised?● eucalyptus plantation – when were they cut?● more dates?● off-farm male employment – degree of work carried out away from the farm● wealth indicators?● malaria peak – check it is in July	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● firewood – ask more women, find more about stoves● soil and water conservation – activities and achievements● reasons why and why not involved in conservation● plans● traditional practices● more farm sketch maps● adult education

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Choosing whom to talk with

How can we ensure that the women chosen to take part in the discussion groups or in interviews, are representative of the community as a whole? They can be chosen on the basis of:

Location: if the investigators are interested in learning about the range of conditions within the village, they need to choose women from different areas of the community, including those who live at the edge of the village, the homeless, the migrants and the squatters.

Chance encounters: as the investigators walk through the area they will inevitably meet people on the paths and in the fields. These encounters could be valuable opportunities to hold brief interviews.

Recommendation: the investigators may be interested in a particular group of women, such as those involved in a specific task. In this case names may be recommended by someone in the village. However, this has the potential for bias from the person who is recommending. Investigators may also contact women and men such as school teachers, leaders and elders (ie, key informants), to learn from their specialist knowledge.

There are many other ways of selecting interviewees. However, it is clear that without some consideration of sampling we will always tend to talk to those with whom we feel most comfortable. More often than not these will be people from our own social group, people we have met before, people who are friendly towards us. This will obviously produce a biased sample and give an unbalanced and partial view of the issues being investigated.

Observation as a learning technique

Another way of learning from and about rural women is through observation where the 'observer' joins the women in their daily activities. Observations can be made on activities, time allocation, and how resources are used and processed.

A word about men

In the great majority of cultures the leaders and elders of a community are male. It is often necessary to approach them first to explain your reasons for talking with the women. This is particularly important if some or all of the investigators are men, in order to avoid any misunderstandings about their motives for visiting women.

Box 3: Key for success – eight steps to working with women

1. **Explore** gender issues through two-way communication with rural women, recognising that the needs of men and women may not be the same, and that the impact of projects on them may differ.
2. **Investigate** the customs, taboos and time constraints that women face. Remember that knowledge and commonsense can play a major part in overcoming these constraints.
3. **Promote** the role that women can, indeed do, play in resource management at every level. Analyse ways in which they are included or excluded from projects.
4. **Exchange** information with individuals at every level. For example, with local women on forestry activities, with practitioners on involving women in forestry, and with policy makers regarding the contribution made by women in forestry.
5. **Support** existing women's groups, and encourage the formation of new groups that could promote opportunities for women in decision-making and the political process, as well as strengthen women's mutual support for one another.
6. **Work together** to provide access to land and other resources. Acknowledge traditional women's holdings, and ensure that women are included on issues such as land privatisation. Seek creative solutions for landless women.
7. **Collaborate** with relevant organisations to facilitate the availability of credit and income facilities both to individual women and women's groups.
8. **Consult** with women before introducing new technology or plant species. Ensure that women's needs are considered, and evaluate the impact of new techniques or plants on their lives.

Source: Restoring the Balance. Women and Forest Resources, FAO

A brief overview of local resources

There are several ways of estimating the range and extent of natural resources present in an area. Depending on local conditions and suitability, any one (or a combination) of the following could be used:

- mapping
- transect walks
- nature trails
- aerial photographs.

Mapping

One of the best ways to start talking with rural women about the natural resources in their village is to ask them to draw a sketch map of their surroundings. It is often assumed that rural, poorly educated people are not able to understand or draw maps or other diagrams. However, it has been found that rural, non-literate women and men can understand maps well, especially if they have

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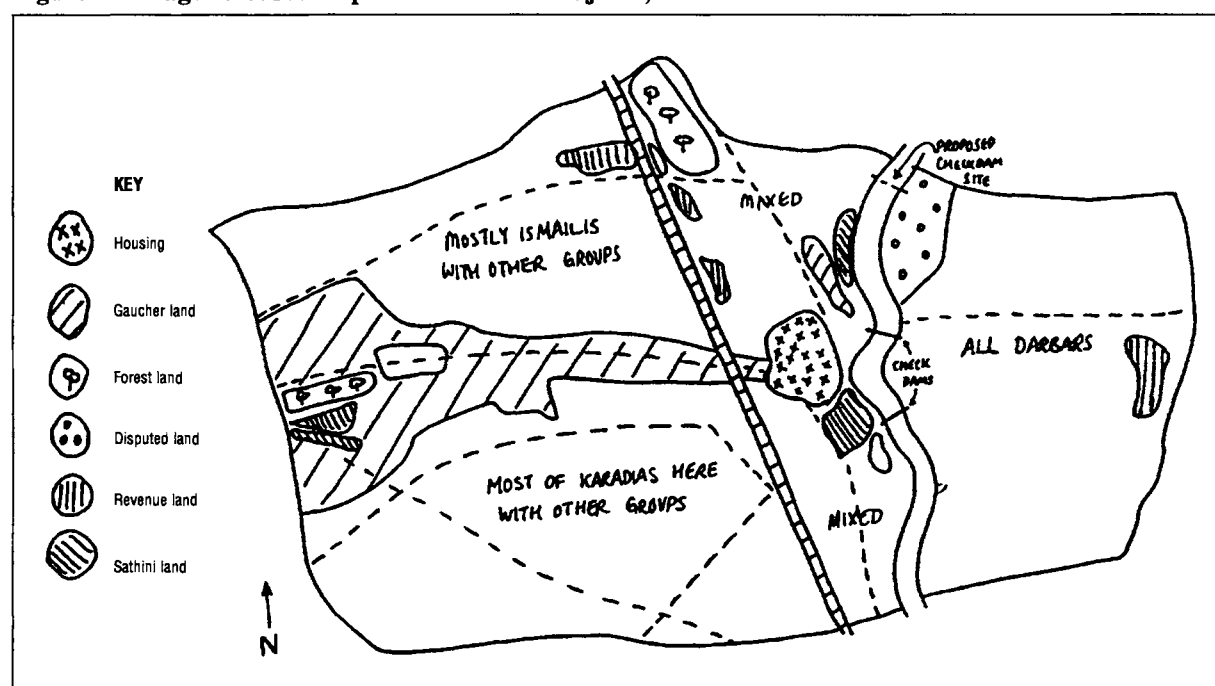
made the maps themselves. Maps drawn by outsiders often introduce unfamiliar perspectives. For example, the orientation with north towards the top of the map is not necessarily how rural people view their village. Symbols of houses and land-use may also cause confusion if drawn by outsiders. In general, unless a clearly understandable map exists of the village, such as one in the village office with which most people are familiar, it is a good idea to ask several women to draw a sketch map themselves. Figures 1 and 2 give examples of maps drawn with the assistance of local people in India.

Here are some tips to remember :

- drawing on the ground is often preferable to using paper and pen, since more people can join in the exercise and changes are easier to make. Sticks, stones, leaves, etc, can be used to represent landmarks. Once completed, the 'map' can be transferred onto paper as a permanent record
- if large scale aerial photographs are available these can be used to first outline village boundary lines, major rivers, areas of forest, etc. Details can be added later
- it is rarely necessary to produce an accurate, scaled, finely drawn map. For the purposes of identifying the local resources and environmental features such as the location of gullies, degraded slopes or sites of conservation measures, a rough sketch is perfectly adequate
- the accuracy of the map can be checked during subsequent interviews and meetings. Changes should be made on the spot. A good map is one which has been scribbled on!
- it is useful to ask a group of people to draw the first version of the map. As they discuss and argue about the correct positioning, an agreement is reached and the final product is likely to be more accurate than if drawn by a single individual.

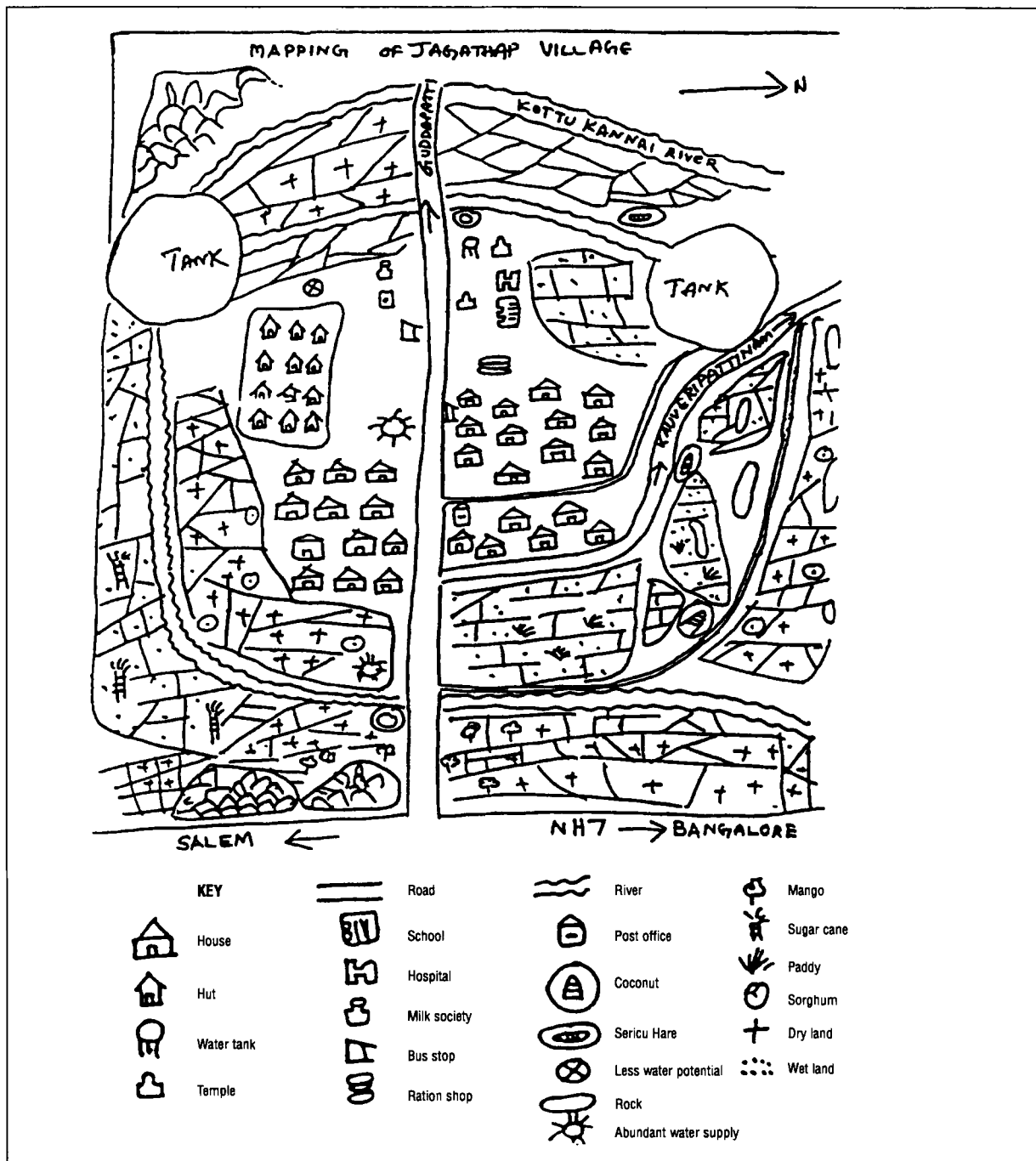
Maps can also be used to help plan which parts of the village the investigator should visit to learn about the different resources and their management. One way to ensure that the range of local environments is seen is to go on a transect walk through the village.

Figure 1: Village resource map of Lathodra in Gujarat, India



Source: McCracken, Jennifer. 1988. Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal in Gujarat: A Trial Model for the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India). International Institute for Environment and Development. London

Figure 2: Village resource map of Jagathap village in Tamil Nadu, India



Source: Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore and International Institute for Environment and Development, London. 1992. Participatory Rural Appraisal for Agricultural Research at Aruppukotai and Paiyur, Tamil Nadu

Walking a transect

This is simply a walk (or a series of walks) which takes the investigators through the different areas of a village and allows them to see the range of conditions across these areas. The walk enables investigators to see some of the more remote parts of a village which might not otherwise be visited. Sometimes, surprising and useful local practices are discovered.

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Some hints on transect walks

- ask some local women and men to accompany you on the walk. Try to choose guides who have lived in the area a long time. Their knowledge will be invaluable
- take your time. A transect walk can last a whole day. These walks are a good opportunity to meet people living in different areas of the village
- record what you see. Take notes and, if appropriate, photographs
- look for differences between the different areas that you pass through. Ask about any specific problems in each area
- do not advise villagers during a transect walk – only observe and understand
- summarise your walk in diagram form. Don't worry about making an exact drawing – the important point is to keep your eyes open, ask questions as you go, and enjoy it!

Figure 3: A transect of Kambalia village in Gujarat, India

	BEACH	FOREST	PRIVATE LAND I	GAUCHER LAND I	HOUSING	PRIVATE LAND II	GAUCHER LAND II
SOIL		SANDY	SANDY RED	RED		BLACK	RED
VEGETATION		CASURINA PROSOPIS GRASS	SORGHUM MILLET PROSOPIS CACTUS (THOR)	GRASS PROSOPIS BANYAN TREES CACTUS (THOR, KUWAR)	PROSOPIS ALMOND TREES NEEM BAMPAN SERIGO PIPAK	GROUNDNUT MILLET SORGHUM PADDY COCONUT TREES BANYAN MANGO PROSOPIS CACTUS (THOR)	GRASS PROSOPIS CACTUS (THOR, KUWAR)
LIVESTOCK		SHEEP & GOATS	CATTLE AND BUFFALO	CATTLE, BUFFALO, SHEEP & GOATS	STALL FEEDING OF CATTLE, BUFFALO, SHEEP AND GOATS	STALL FEEDING IN HOMESTEADS	CATTLE, BUFFALO, SHEEP AND GOATS
OWNERSHIP		FOREST DEPT.	MAINLY RABARIS SOME AMIRI	PANCHAYAT	—	MAINLY AMIRI SOME RABARIS AND KORU	PANCHAYAT
WATER SOURCES		NALLAH	OPEN WELLS FOR DRINKING WATER AND IRRIGATION	—	HANDPUMPS PIPELINE FOR DRINKING WATER WELLS	OPEN WELLS FOR IRRIGATION	PERCOLATION TANK
PROBLEMS		POOR SURVIVAL OF TREES ILLEGAL CUTTING & GRAZING	SALINITY WATERLOGGING STRONG WINDS ONLY 1 CROP (IN WINTER)	VERY ROCKY OVERGRAZING ENCROACHMENT	DELABORATED HOUSES SALINE WATER IN HANDPUMPS & WELLS	SALINITY SHEET EROSION STONY	ROCKY OVERGRAZING MUCH ENCROACHMENT TANK NOT HOLDING WATER

Source: McCracken, Jennifer. 1988. Participatory Rapid Rural Appraisal in Gujarat: A Trial Model for the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India). International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London

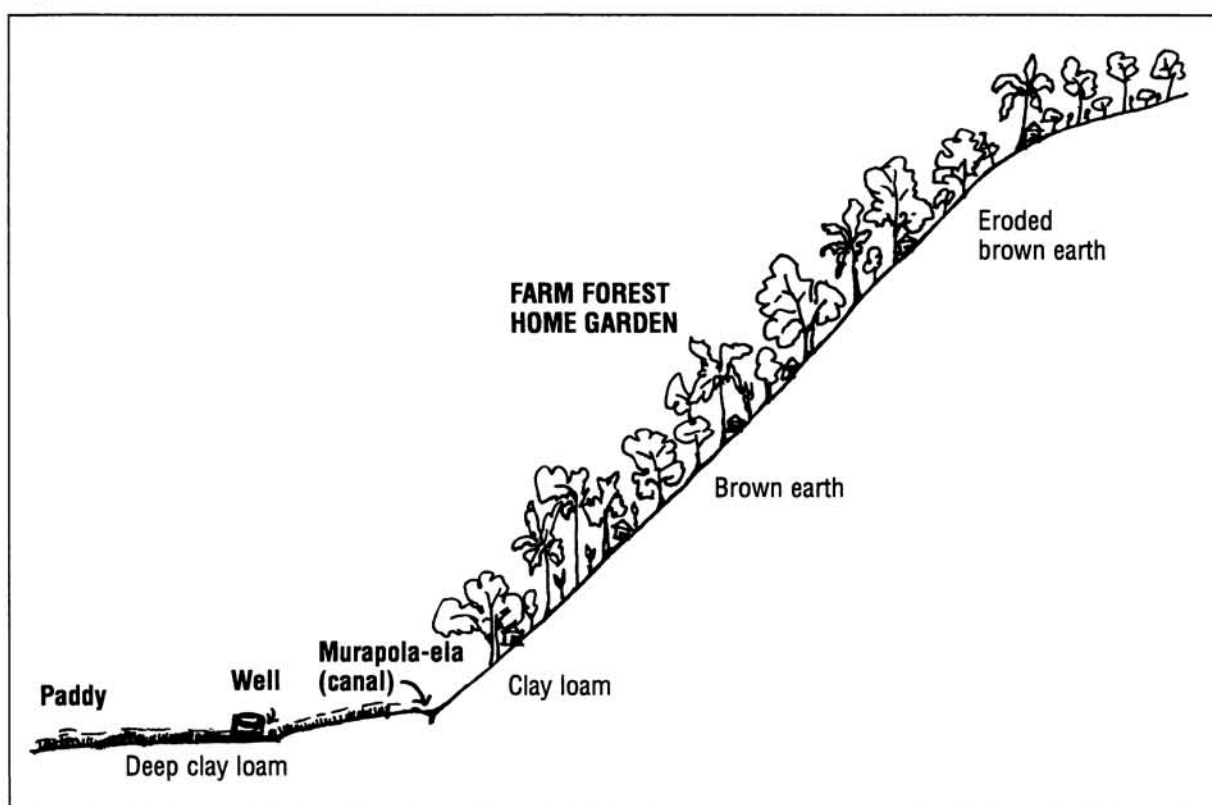
Box 4: Discoveries during a transect

The following local practices were reported to have been discovered during transect walks in different parts of India:

- in the Rajasthan desert, 20 grass and six shrub species, each useful for fodder for different animals at different times of the year, were found
- in West Bengal, the seepage tank technology developed by farmers was discovered
- at Mahilong village in Bihar, 28 different varieties of paddy rice were identified, together with ploughs made from different woods and different designs for each type of soil.

Source: International Institute for Environment and Development and MYRADA. Participatory Rural Appraisal. Proceedings of the February 1991 Bangalore PRA Trainers Workshop. RRA Notes No. 13

Figure 4: Transect of Kolabissa, Sri Lanka



Source: Wickramasinghe, Anoja. (1992)

Nature trails

Nature trails are a particular type of transect walk. They are especially useful for identifying local types of trees and plants and discussing their value with the women who make use of them.

Walking through a plot of relatively remote woodland would reveal many more and different natural resources from those found during a walk in a heavily exploited patch of forest. The differences could form an interesting starting point for a discussion with the women on the changes caused by human activity and the implications of these changes.

Learning from rural women

Aerial photographs

Looking at aerial photographs can be an excellent way of getting an overview, or a 'bird's eye view' of an area and its natural resources. The photographs can also show us places which we are unable (or unwilling!) to go to see for ourselves. Research has shown that local people are quite capable of using photographs if they can identify one clear feature such as a river, hill or road.

EXERCISE 6

Walking a transect

If all the participants are familiar with the area around the training site, ask them to split into groups to draw a sketch map of the local environment. To make it more interesting, ask one group to draw their map on the ground, another to use paper and pen, another to use blackboard and chalk, and so on, and then to compare the types of maps produced.

If possible, ask the participants to walk a transect across the area in which they are staying. The route of the transect can be decided after drawing the map, and can be designed so as to include all the main types of land use. Ask them to draw a summary of the transect, noting down vegetation type, ownership, water sources, key problems and limitations, and so on.

Learning about environmental changes

The environmental history of a village can explain much about why the present situation is as it seems and can help to explain people's attitudes to present day resources. For example, an apparent over-exploitation of forest land can be better understood if we find that up until very recently there was an abundant area of forest and little difficulty in obtaining wood. Similarly, present trends in use of resources or in environmental degradation can be used, with care, to foresee any problems that may lie ahead and possible ways to prevent these problems occurring. There are several ways of learning about past changes and trends:

Interviews

By talking with older people, we can learn much from hearing about the changes they have seen in their lifetime. They may also be able to remember the stories told by their parents and grandparents, of how the land was used by previous generations. If brought together in a group, they can help to check each other's memories and thus provide more reliable information.

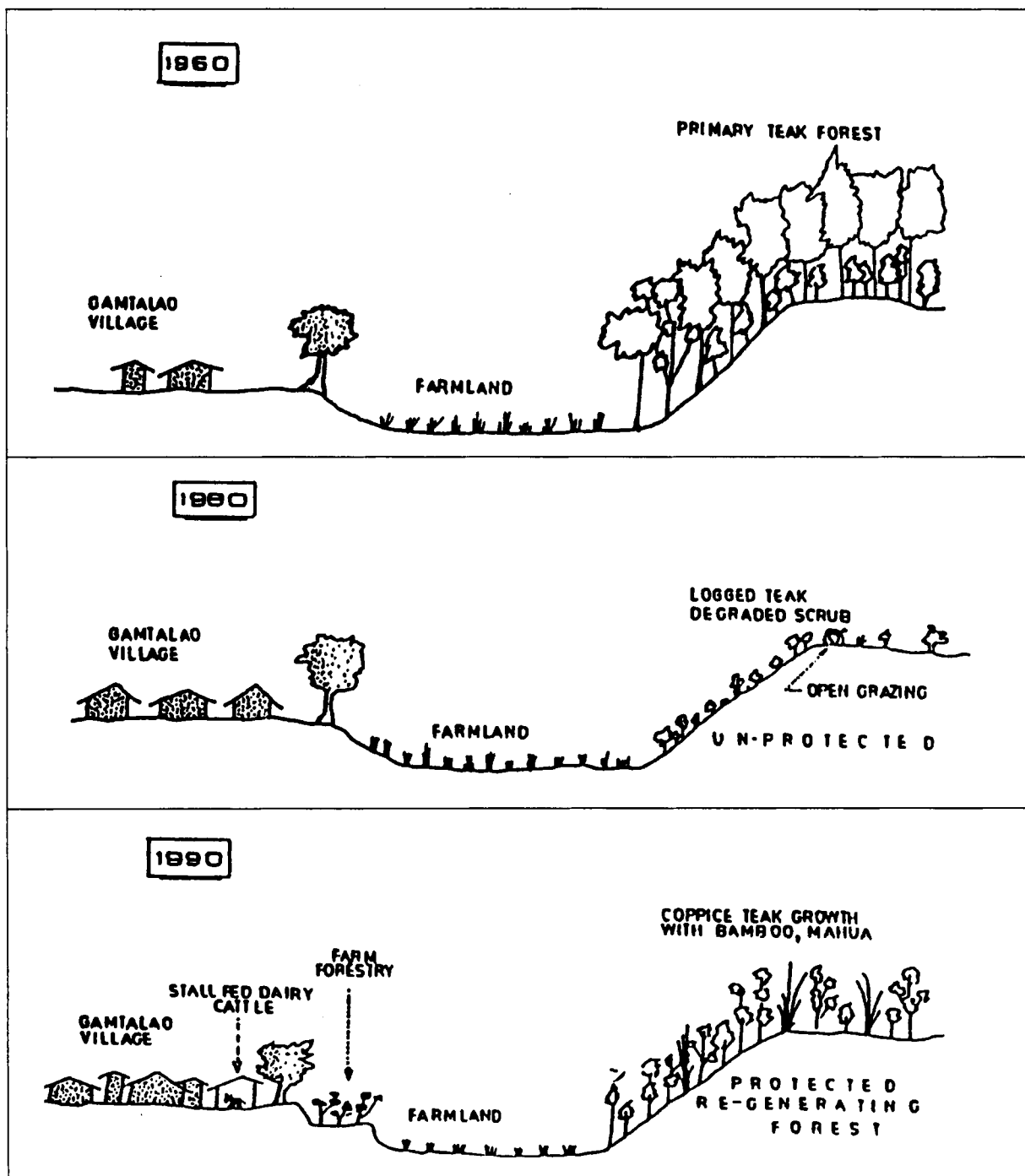
Old aerial photographs

If available, old aerial photographs can provide valuable information on landscapes, for example, showing the original size of lakes, forests, grazing areas, the course of rivers, the extent of housing areas, or the types of crops grown. They are useful tools in helping to jog the memory of older women and men during interviews focusing on changes in the environment.

Historical transects

One way of representing past landscapes is as a series of transects. Historical transects can be drawn either during interviews with older women and men from the village, or can be constructed by the investigators after interviews and discussions in the field. Figure 5, below, provides an example.

Figure 5: Historical transect drawn by villagers of Gamtalao, Gujarat, India



Source: Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development, 1992. Joint Forest Management. Field Methods Manual. Vol I. New Delhi

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Historical calendars

Previous years' seasonal trends can be shown as a series of calendars, to illustrate changes in and use of resources. As with historical transects, these can be constructed during interviews with elderly members of a community and checked on-the-spot.

Models

One step on from mapping on the ground, constructing a model of a village can be a valuable exercise in learning about the land use and topography of the area. These models do take time and can become quite elaborate but are also a great deal of fun.

Models are also a good way of reconstructing past landscapes, particularly when looking at land use and the status of the environment in former days. They can also show what future landscapes may look like. In India, farmers were asked to construct two different models of how they saw their catchment area in the future. One model, with many trees and well managed slopes showed how they would like it to be. The other model had bare slopes, gullies and a very degraded landscape. Indeed to make it worse still, a farmer collected ash from his home and scattered it over the model! This was how they saw their village if nothing was done to prevent over-use of current resources.

Learning about resource use

Resource use is often a function of:

- perceptions about resources
- preferences
- work roles.

To understand who uses what and for what purpose, it is necessary to understand how different people view their resources and what activities they are required to perform.

How do women perceive their environment?

Everyone views their surroundings in slightly different ways. How can we best find out about these differences?

One way is to use a variation of the mapping technique. Rather than asking a group of people to produce a map on which they all basically agree, several individuals can each be asked to draw the local area from their individual perspective.

Comparing these different impressions of the same area can reveal some interesting points of view. For example, how will personal maps drawn by women and men would differ?

An example (cited in *IIED*. 1991. RRA Notes Number 14) comes from Bangladesh where squatters on a government embankment beside a river were asked to draw maps. The squatters are now landless as their traditional lands lie below the river. The young men resort to migrant labour for

many months of the year. Three sets of people – young men, women and old men – were asked to carry out this exercise.

The resulting three maps clearly illustrated the different priorities, perceptions and orientations of the three groups. Whereas the young men marked the tracks surrounding their settlement and the road and railway links to their places of work, the women, who were restricted to their immediate surroundings and rarely move away from the embankment studiously plotted the individual houses and land use within the settlement. The old men's map charted precisely the land which they still considered their own, beneath the flowing river.

Figures 6 and 7 show two social maps, the first drawn by the men and the second by the women of a village in Maharashtra, India. One major point of difference in the two was the absence of footpaths in the men's map, which focused more on roads. The women, who used footpaths extensively for the collection of fuelwood, fodder and water, highlighted the footpaths in their map. Even though the men were aware of the footpaths in the village, they did not consider them of much significance, since they used roads for travelling out of the village to work.

EXERCISE 7

Men and women's perception of their local area

Ask the participants to look at the maps in Figures 6 and 7. There are several key differences between the image of the village as seen by men and by the women. Ask the participants to work in small groups to see what the maps tell us about the person who has drawn it (ie, what they feel is important, what is less relevant to them, and so on). Ask them to present their key ideas on flipchart paper and discuss the results of each small group.

The workload of rural women

There are two problems in finding out about the workload of rural women:

- unless we spend several months in a village it is very difficult to see for ourselves the types of activities with which the women are involved and especially the different tasks undertaken at different times of the year. The division of labour in a family will vary from place to place and even from household to household
- it is extremely difficult to quantify the work load of rural women, either in terms of hours worked per activity or effort involved per activity, or even hours worked per day. Part of the problem is that a woman may be doing several different jobs at the same time. While she is supervising the family's livestock grazing on the common land she may also be collecting dung and wood for fuel and wild plants for cooking.

Labour calendars

How can we get at least a rough estimate of women's work load? One way is to construct a labour calendar to show how the relative labour demands of women change during the year. Examples of these calendars can be seen in Figures 8 and 9.

Learning from rural women

Figure 6: Social map drawn by men in Maharashtra, India

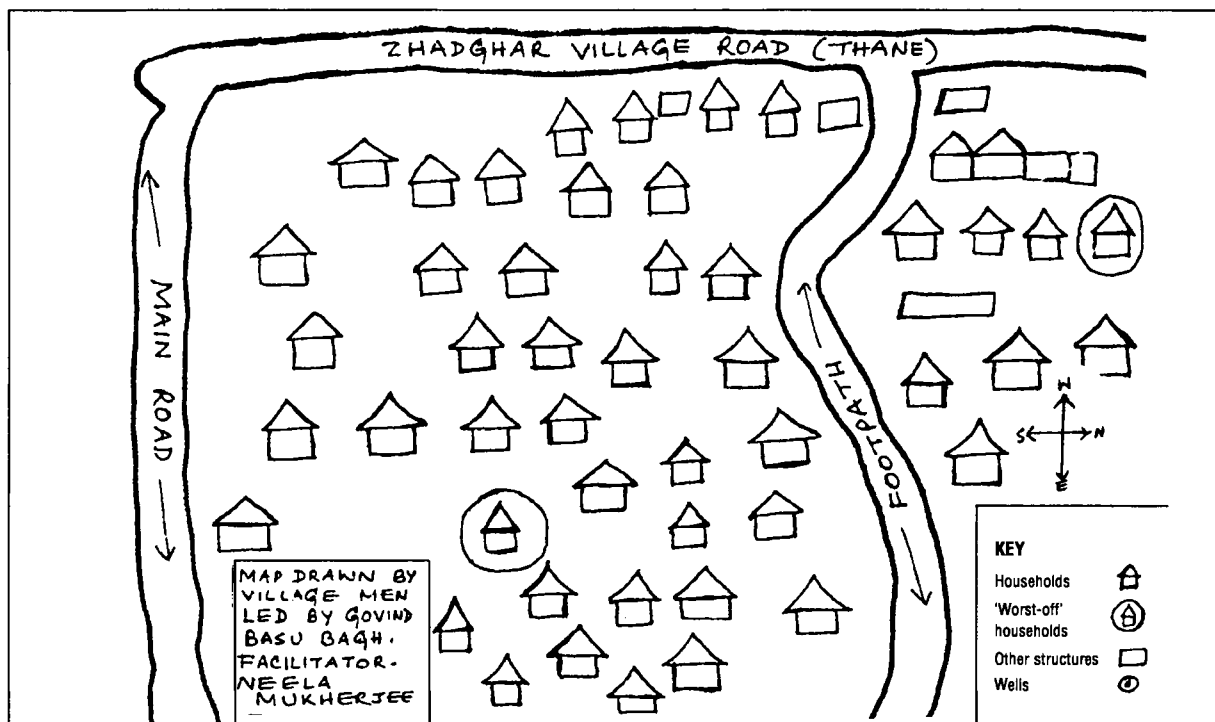
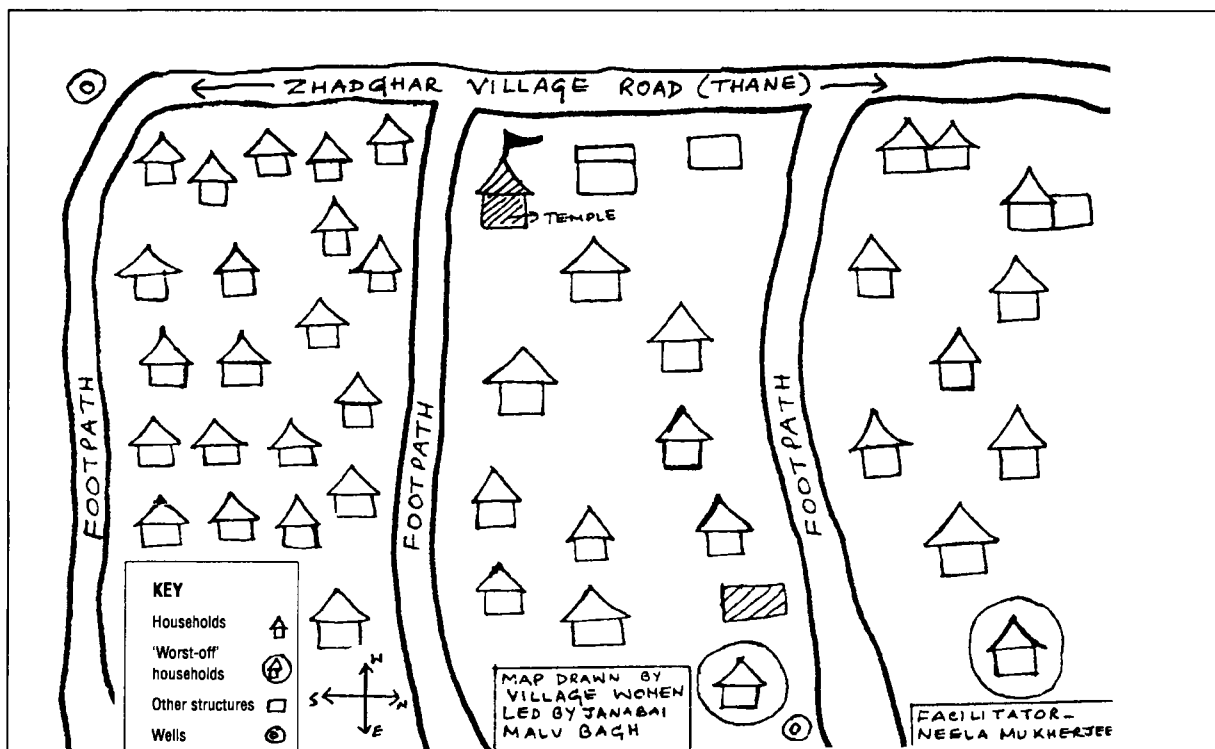


Figure 7: Social map drawn by women in Maharashtra, India



Source: Mukherjee, Neela. 1993. Participatory Rural Appraisal. Methodology and Applications. Concept Publishing Company. Delhi

Labour calendars indicate:

- in which months the women and/or men will be busiest
- when the extra activities may have to compete with agricultural or other labour peaks
- when the slack periods occur, during which time the new activities may be most appropriate.

Some hints on constructing labour calendars:

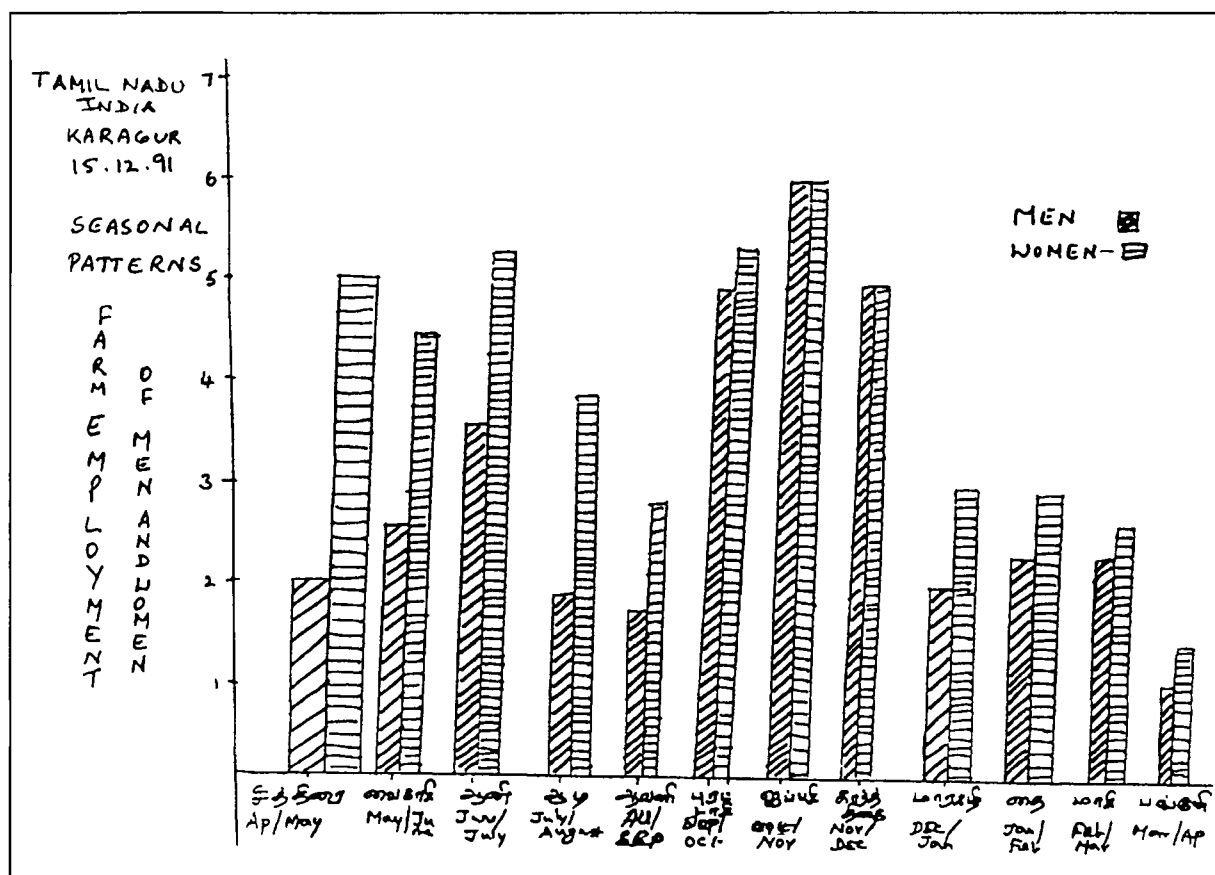
- start by asking the women which month is the busiest for them. Give this month a maximum height on the calendar bar chart. Ask what activities they are involved in during this month. Note these down
- ask for the second most busy month. To get a relative measurement, ask how it compares with the busiest month. Is it half as busy, or three-quarters, or one-quarter as busy? Or, preferably, ask the women to draw the appropriate height of this month's labour demand
- continue with the third and fourth most busy months. Then it may be easier to continue by asking for the *least* busy month, ie, the slackest month, then the second, third and fourth, and so on. The 'middle' months can then be filled in by comparing against others already dealt with
- it may be more appropriate to begin the calendar not with January but with, for example, the month at the beginning of the agricultural cycle. This is the case in figure 10. It is also useful to use the local calendar when constructing the diagram, and afterwards to translate it into the calendar system with which we are most familiar
- all this is easier if each women draws her calendar
- a group of women can be asked to produce a labour calendar. As with the mapping technique, this is a useful way to get a consensus answer, but may hide individual differences
- it may be useful to know the differences between the seasonal labour patterns of women and men in the same village. In this case, repeat the exercise with men.

Box 5: Our labour calendar is wrong

In a village in India, a group of men and women were asked to draw their labour calendars – one for men and one for women. They drew both calendars on the ground, using pieces of straw to mark the bars of each month's labour demand. When both calendars were complete, the women came closer to view the final results. They began to discuss among themselves, and looked quite agitated at what they saw. When asked what the matter was they said : 'When we compare these two calendars, they do not tell the truth. Our calendar is wrong! It only shows agricultural work, not our extra household work. We must add a whole band to the bottom of our calendar, to show that we do extra work at home as well as in the fields!' The adjusted calendar showed the women had a much higher work load than the men.

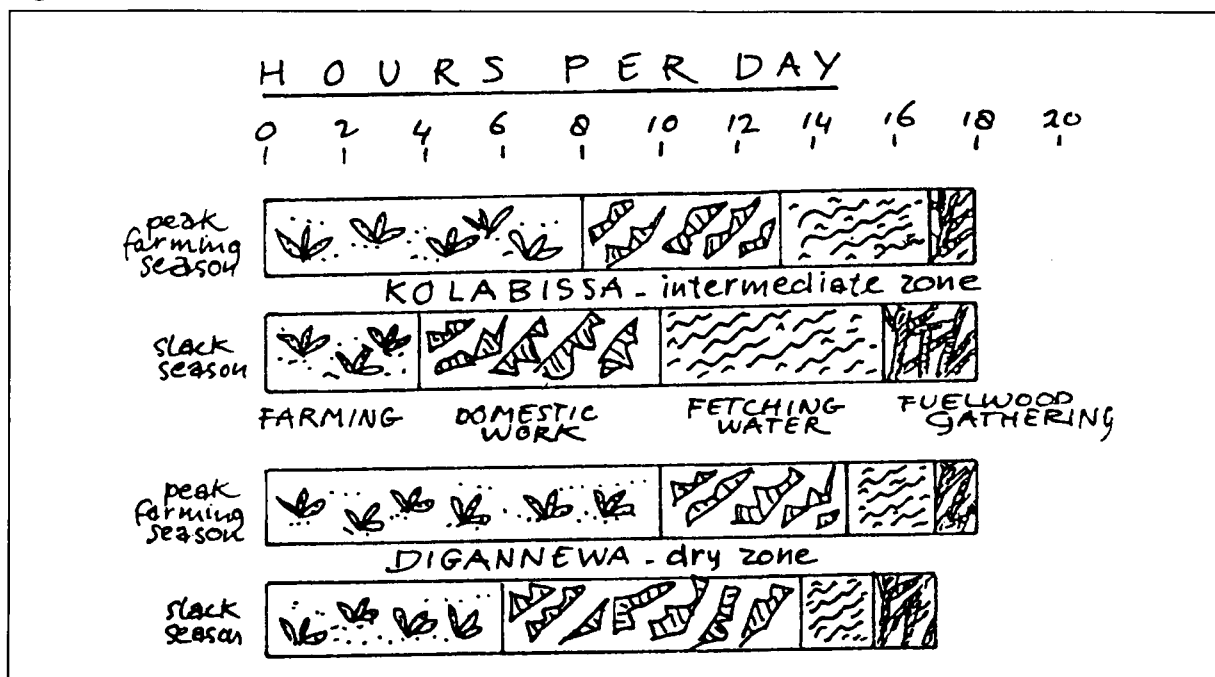
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Figure 8: seasonal calendar for farm employment for men and women in Tamil Nadu, India



Source: Tamil Nadu Agricultural University and IIED. 1992. Participatory Rural Appraisal for Agricultural Research at Aruppukottai and Paiyur, Tamil Nadu.

Figure 9: Pattern of time allocation of women in rural Sri Lanka



Source: Anoja Wickramasinghe

Daily activity schedules

A typical day's work can also be the topic of an interview and here again, interesting comparisons can be drawn between the ways men and women spend their time. Different women will also have different daily routines.

EXERCISE 8

Labour calendars

To practice drawing labour calendars, ask the participants to divide into groups of three. One person from each group can be the respondent, the other two the interviewers. It is the respondent who draws her/his own labour calendar, ie, their work pattern over a year, while the two interviewers help and ask questions following the hints provided. If there is time, repeat the process with a different respondent from each group. Finally, with the calendars transferred on to large/flipchart sheets of paper, compare the results. Note different work patterns and what they show about the different respondents. Discuss the value of this type of information in planning, monitoring, or evaluating a project initiative.

In a similar way, ask the participants to practice drawing their own daily activity schedules. They may also like to try and recall the different patterns of their youth. Again, present and compare the schedules of each respondent.

Different preferences for resource use

Learning why people make the decisions they do is the key to understanding the ways in which they use natural resources. These choices are usually made on the basis of a number of criteria. In comparing different items, two individuals in similar situations may make very different choices or else may make similar choices for very different reasons. How can we learn something about these complex decisions and how they are made?

One simple, but helpful technique is that of preference ranking. This involves asking an individual (or a group) to rank in order of their own personal preference a set of items, and to give the reasons for their preferences. These items could be anything from tree species, livestock types, or vegetable types, to income sources, types of fertiliser, or land management techniques. The resulting ranked list will show both the order of preference of the items and the criteria on which these preferences were based. There are several different ways of finding out about these preferences. Two of the preference ranking techniques, pairwise comparison and matrix ranking, are outlined below:

Pairwise comparison

This version of the technique involves a sequence of comparisons, where two items at a time are rated against each other. Here are the steps involved:

1. Ask the woman to choose the set of items to be ranked. For example, if you are interested in learning about women's interest in growing vegetables, ask a woman (or a group of women) to choose a number of vegetables with which they are familiar. For the purposes of the ranking

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exercise, it is probably best to limit this number to five. Let us assume the woman has chosen to rank sweet potato, cabbage, carrot, onion and tomato.

2. Pick any two of these five vegetables and ask the women which of these she would prefer to grow. If possible have examples of each of these vegetables to hand, to stimulate discussion. Alternatively, use five pieces of paper representing them, in front of the women. Note which she prefers and use probing questions to find out why she prefers this one
3. Then choose a different pair of vegetables and ask the woman which one of these she would prefer to grow and why
4. Continue until you have worked through all the combinations
5. Draw up the results as a list and ask the woman whether she agrees with the end result

One way to keep a record of each comparison is in a matrix. One for the above example could look something like this:

Sweet potato (SP)					
Cabbage (CB)	SP				
Carrot (CR)	SP	CR			
Onion (O)	SP	O	O		
Tomato (T)	SP	T	T	O	
	Sweet potato	Cabbage	Carrot	Onion	Tomato

The 'winner', ie, most preferred of each comparison is entered in the appropriate box. In the case of ranking five items, as above, you can see there are ten different comparisons to make (ie, 10 boxes to fill in). The final ranking is then simply a matter of adding up the number of times each vegetable appears as a 'winner'. Here Sweet potato won four times, onion three times, tomato twice, carrot once and cabbage was never preferred in a comparison. Hence the ranking in this case is :

1. Sweet potato (most popular crop)
2. Onion
3. Tomato
4. Carrot
5. Cabbage (least popular crop)

The more interesting result of the ranking technique however is often the criteria which have been used.

Matrix ranking

This is a different version of the preference ranking technique. It involves the following steps :

1. Ask the women to choose the items they would like to rank, as in the pairwise comparison technique

2. Taking each item in turn, ask about its good points and bad points. Try to get as many as possible
3. List all these criteria. Turn negative criteria (bad points) into positive ones. For example 'vulnerable to pests' becomes 'not vulnerable to pests'. So all criteria are now positive
4. Draw up a matrix with the items across the top and the criteria down the side
5. For each criteria in turn, ask which item is best. Give this item the value of 1. Ask which is next best, give this item value 2, ask which is next best, and so on
6. Work down the matrix filling in the rankings
7. Finally ask the question 'If you could only choose one of these items, which would you choose?'. This will give some indication of the relative weighting of the different criteria.

An example of a matrix ranking of tree species done in India is given in Figure 10, below.

Figure 10: Matrix ranking of tree species according to villagers' own criteria in Phulwadi village, India

SCORES OF EIGHT TREES ACCORDING TO FIVE CRITERIA. GROUP-3A								
PHOOLWARI VILLAGE MATRIX RANKING TREES. 1. MINIMUM 6. MAXIMUM								
	TEAK	HALDU	KHAIR	KALLAM	SADAD	BAMBOO	MAHUA	EUCALYPTUS
TIMBER	★★★★★ ★	★★★ ★	★★★ ★★	★★★	★★★	★★★ ★	★★	★★★
FODDER	NIL	***	**	***	***	***	NIL	NIL
FUELWOOD	NIL	NIL	☼☼	☼☼	☼☼	NIL	☼	☼☼☼ ☼☼
AGRICULTURAL IMPLIMENTS	△△△△△	△	△△△	NIL	NIL	NIL	△△	△△
MEDICINE	☼☼	☼☼	☼	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
OTHERS	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	☼☼☼☼	☼☼☼☼	NIL

Source: Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development. 1992. Joint Forest Management. Field Methods Manual. Vol. I. New Delhi

Uses and limitations of ranking

The ranking technique can discover the reasons why women and men make different choices. Often women farmers make choices about food crops and fruit on the basis of their nutritional value, their ease of cooking and their medicinal qualities as well as their growth characteristics. Men on the other hand will often emphasise the economic value of the crops, and rarely mention the criteria which women find important.

Learning from rural women

These differences in criteria can sometimes help to explain the conflicts in interest between men and women when new species, new techniques or other innovations are introduced into the area. It would be useful, for example, if agricultural extension agents planning to encourage tree growing through agroforestry were to first conduct some ranking exercises with a number of local women and men in order to discover what features of the trees are important to each group.

This raises one limitation of the ranking technique. Since the choices made are so individual to every person, a ranking result should not be used to recommend a particular item which appeared as the first in one, or even several, rankings. The idea that a farmer actually chooses one item is in practice a false one. A farmer very rarely grows just one species of tree, or uses a single soil conservation technique. Rankings simply show the need for choices to be available, and should not be used to advocate concentrating solely on the 'winning' item.

Likewise, the results of a limited number of rankings should not be extended to produce recommendations for a whole village or area. They can give some ideas but should not be relied on for anything beyond this.

EXERCISE 9

Consumer preference ranking

You, as the trainer, take on the role of director of a fruit and vegetable development project in your own country. Tell the participants that you have already conducted a survey of the producers, to find out which types of fruit and vegetables they prefer to grow. You now want to know the preferences of the consumers. So, divide the participants into groups of three, with one respondent, (the consumer) and two interviewers in each group. Ask the participants to choose four types of fruits and four types of vegetables to use in the preference rankings. Make sure all the respondents are familiar with all of these. Give half the groups the opportunity to rank the fruit, and the other half can rank the vegetables. Allow each group to decide whether they would like to use the pairwise comparison technique or the matrix ranking. Allow 30-40 minutes for each ranking. Finally ask a spokesperson from each group to report back the findings and identify the key results of use in planning the project.

Local management of resources

Conflicts of interest

A community is generally composed of a number of different groups, some in direct conflict with each other, some more powerful than the rest, and some particularly disadvantaged. Within these groups there may be differences of opinion and points of conflict. For example:

- landless households in a village have petitioned the village council to allow them to farm some of the common land, currently used for grazing. Livestock owners in the village have reacted against this, seeing it as a threat to their herds. Members of the village council are more likely to be livestock owners than landless
- the men of a village have become interested in a coffee project which has just been started in the area. They have heard that their incomes could double if they replaced some of their maize crop with coffee trees. They are keen to work with the project. However, the women are very unsure about the idea. They fear that their workload will increase, as they have heard how much care the coffee trees need. They also feel there will be problems if they grow less maize – where will they get enough food for the family and what will replace the maize stalks for fodder for cattle? They also wonder who will benefit from the extra cash which the coffee trees might provide. The women and men discuss the project and cannot agree.

One way to learn about these conflicts of interest is through focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are a particular type of discussion, where a set of people are brought together specifically to discuss a particular issue. As the discussion focuses on a single issue, it is easier to deal with the subject in some depth. If the group is made up of people with common concerns, or people facing a common problem, a focused discussion allows them to be more frank and honest than they may otherwise be, say in an open meeting in the community.

Focus group discussions differ from other types of interview in that the interviewer's role is one of moderating the interviewees' discussions rather than asking questions of each member of the group. One application of this technique allows discussions to take place firstly within different interest groups, and then between these groups.

Box 6: Organising focus group discussions

- keep the size of each group to a manageable number – the optimum size is probably between three and 15 individuals
- choosing who should attend a focus group meeting is liable to introduce bias. If a leader is asked to nominate participants, his or her choice will be influenced by his/her friends and acquaintances. This is difficult to overcome, but every effort should be made to get a representative group effort
- choose a site where the group will feel comfortable to talk, and where there are unlikely to be any unwanted observers or intruders
- choose a time which suits everyone in the group
- start the discussions on a light-hearted note. Ranking games are ideal
- explain carefully at the beginning of the discussions why you have called the group together, and what you would like them to discuss
- try to ensure that every member of the group gets an opportunity to speak. Don't allow one member to dominate the discussion

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Box 6 (continued): Organising focus group discussions

- the discussion should not last much more than two hours, unless all of the local members of the group want to continue
- organising these meetings takes time and attending them also makes use of valuable time for the rural people. Be aware that people may miss important employment opportunities or may have to delay other activities in order to attend the meetings
- following up the meetings by supporting the implementation of any agreements reached is a vital part of the work.

A word of caution

There are a number of risks involved in investigating conflict:

- by making the conflict more public and by providing a forum in which the differences can be discussed openly, these different opinions may become even more hotly contended, and the conflict may actually deepen
- the more powerful and influential interest groups in the community may be put in a better position to force their opinion on other groups. They may use the group discussion sessions for propaganda purposes rather than for constructive discussion with others
- a third potential danger is that the investigator/s may appear to take sides in the argument. If, for example, they spend more time talking with one particular interest group, the other groups may see that as evidence of the investigator's biased support for that group's argument.

Those responsible for managing the group discussions need to be able to control the different interest groups represented, and to encourage the less strong groups to speak out. They also need to be very open and to explain why they are trying to gather such information.

Despite these difficulties, it is often very important to learn about conflict situations. For example, an apparently inexplicable pattern of land-use may make sense once it is discovered that there are disputes and conflicts over rights to that area of land. Also, conflicts between different groups in a community may hinder any planned community-based activities. In such circumstances, it is often worth spending extra time investigating the conflicts in a sensitive and careful way.

EXERCISE 10

Managing conflict

To give the participants some practice in handling situations of conflict, ask them to choose a topic around which they could perform a role-play that highlights the conflicting viewpoints of different groups in a community. For instance, they might choose to explore the issue of firewood scarcity, and show the viewpoints of the poorer women (who spend more time and/or money collecting or buying the firewood), richer women (who have alternative sources of fuel, or who are involved with fuelwood merchants who come to the village to sell the scarce resource), the older women and men (who call for a return to the days when fuelwood was plentiful) and newcomers (who bring reports of what has happened in other parts of the country). When the drama has been performed and the different viewpoints and conflicts discussed, ask the participants to enact a village meeting to further discuss their positions. Assign the role of an outside extension agent to one of the participants. This

person's role is to control the discussion so that everyone has a say, and to try and facilitate a consensus on how the problems can best be solved. Finally, allow the participants to step out of their roles and discuss the problems involved in dealing with such sensitive situations.

Local institutions and groups

Learning about which formal institutions are present in a community is relatively straightforward. But how can we learn about the informal groups and the extent to which the various institutions link together and collaborate? If we are investigating the use of natural resources in a village, we need to know which groups are responsible for deciding how the resources are used, for example, the water management committee (controlling use of irrigation water), the village council (controlling disputes over land), the local women's groups (organising a rota system for working in the village tree nursery), and so on.

A quick way of starting to learn about this is to construct a venn diagram. This is simply a set of overlapping circles, each circle representing an institution or group and the overlap between circles depicting the extent to which the institutions overlap and collaborate in practice. The relative size of the circle representing an institution is drawn to indicate the relative importance of the institution in the village, ie, the influence which it exerts in the community.

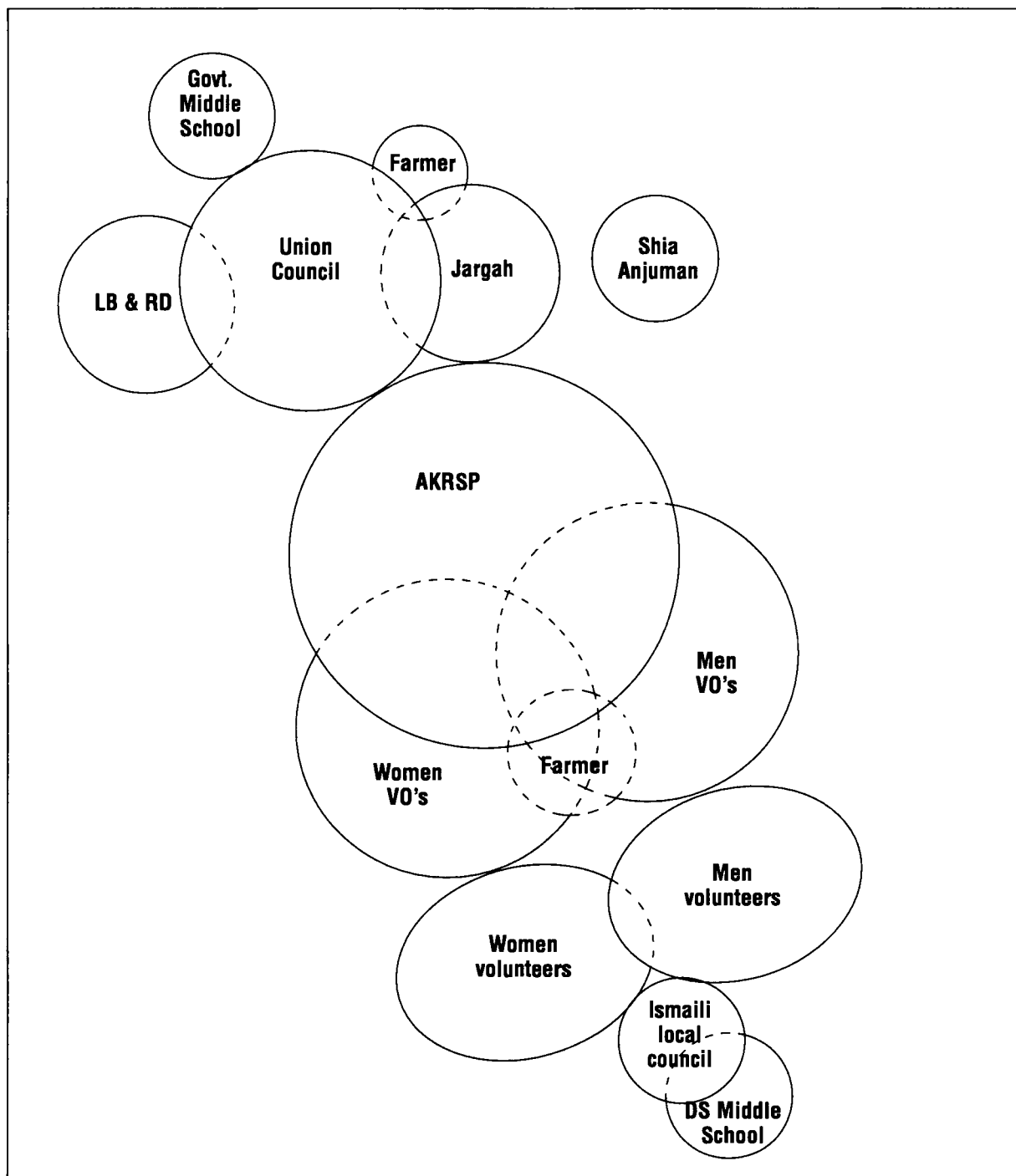
The venn diagram may be first constructed using cut-out circles of card, which are placed overlapping on top of each other. This can be done by a local leader or school teacher or anyone else familiar with the formal and informal groups in the village. Once satisfied with the lay-out of the circles, the diagram can be transferred on to paper.

The completed venn diagrams are summaries of which groups are present within a community, which outside groups have contacts inside the community and how these different groups are linked together.

An example of institutional overlap in a village in Pakistan is presented in Figure 11. The central institution shown is an NGO, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).

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Figure 11: Venn diagram of institutional overlap of a village in Northern Pakistan



Source: Conway, Gordon, McCracken, Jennifer, Pretty, Jules. 1987. *Training Notes for Agroecosystem Analysis and Rapid Rural Appraisal*. IIED. London

What happens next?

After you have spent some time talking with and learning from rural women, the information you have accumulated can be used in the following ways:

Reporting the results

In order to work together well with the local people, it is important that you make time to share your findings with them and keep them up-to-date with your own ideas and plans.

It may be useful to organise an open community meeting to which everyone is invited to attend. However, it is important to remember the following points:

- the size of the meeting should not become too large
- the time of day at which the meeting is held should be convenient to as many people as possible
- the meetings should not be dominated by a few individuals. Everyone should be able to participate equally.

Remembering the above points, good use can be made of visual presentation material to show those results which can be depicted pictorially. Posters, cartoons, maps and calendars can be presented.

In addition to holding these report-back meetings, producing a written report of the newly gained information is a valuable part of the survey/learning work.

Planning activities

There is no single way of turning the learning about an issue to action simply by talking with rural women. This process is very dependent on, among other things, the agency involved and its existing structure, the investigators involved and their preferred way of working, the type of activities being planned and the main initiators.

If, however, there are no plans for any immediate follow-up activities, the information can still be valuable for reviewing the impact of past activities and revising existing work plans. It can also be used as a base for future studies or field activities. In any case, the investigators will now have an 'insider's view' in addition to their own perspectives. If the learning work has been truly participatory, the rural women and men involved will also have learned from the experience. This can encourage cooperative efforts in future conservation activities, as the outsiders and insiders work with each other.

A word of caution

The best Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises are the beginning of a process which moves from gathering information, to planning and implementing action in collaboration with the people concerned. This implies there is a realistic hope of doing something at the end of the planning stage. If not, the exercise may only serve to raise false hopes within a community. For example, if it emerges from investigations that the central problem of the village is water supply, are the outsiders in a position to help with a well?

Learning from rural women

Some practical points to remember

It is impossible to plan a perfect piece of field work – something always changes the programme! But here are a few things to bear in mind when planning the work in order to avoid some obvious pitfalls:

People

The number of people working in this learning/survey work needs to be kept small. The actual number will of course depend on the purpose of the study, the size of the area to be visited, and the way that the survey is to be organised.

If outside people are involved, the team may be most effective (and less intimidating!) if split into small groups of two or three people, when visiting a community.

An equal number of women and men on the team makes the investigation itself more balanced.

Local people make ideal investigators. They generally have fewer difficulties in communicating with the rural communities. They know the local dialect, the local forms of address and customs, and they are less likely to become the centre of attraction when they visit a village. However, it can also be useful to include some non-local people on the team, to bring a different perspective. They may be able to contribute ideas which they have learned elsewhere and since they know less about the area they will be less likely to make prior assumptions about what they will find there. Indeed local investigators often admit that they find it difficult to ask questions in their neighbourhood, as they will usually already have their own ideas about the answers!

Payment

If local women and men are involved in the investigations they may have missed the chance to earn money or had to postpone an important task on their farm. In such a case, some kind of compensation would seem reasonable. However, the use of financial incentives is full of dangers. People may be quick to provide information in order to get payment, but the quality of information they provide may not be as reliable as that provided by those who are genuinely interested in the investigations, even if they are not paid.

One possible option is to pay the local women and men in kind rather than in cash. For example, they may appreciate receiving some tree seedlings, a simple extension booklet, or a hand-tool. The appropriate solution will need to be worked out according to the local situation.

Timing

The work needs to be planned for a period of time when:

- the rural women and men are not too busy to spend time with the investigator(s), for example, *not* during peak sowing or harvesting season in the case of agricultural communities
- the climate is not likely to hamper the work, ie, the roads are not likely to be blocked by heavy rainfall
- the workload of the investigator(s) is not too heavy
- ideas for action which may result from the learning work can be fitted into the planning schedule of the agency involved.

If the work is likely to involve several days of visits in a community, the investigator(s) should first visit the local leaders to explain their plans and to ask their permission.

Where to stay

If the investigator(s) have to travel long distances to reach the communities they wish to visit, or if transport facilities are not freely available, it is probably better to arrange to stay overnight in the community. Staying there also helps the investigator(s) get to know the people and the place more quickly. Evenings are often good times for discussion, and early mornings and late evenings can be interesting times to watch activities such as farmers using night irrigation or outside labourers going to and from their daily work.